

McMaster, Anew

by Christopher Fitz-Simon

McMaster, Anew (Andrew) (1891–1962), actor-manager, was born 26 December 1891 at 2 Palm Hill, Birkenhead, Cheshire (not at Monaghan in 1894, as he claimed in *Who's who in the theatre*). 'Anew' was a childish mispronunciation of Andrew. His parents were Andrew McMaster, a master stevedore of Ulster presbyterian extraction, and his wife, Alice McMaster (née Thompson), whose family came from Warrenpoint, Co. Down, and who died when Anew was three. Andrew then married into the shipping family of Papayanni and rose on the social ladder; he intended his eldest son for banking, but Anew ran away in order to escape the sabbatarian and mercantile atmosphere of the family home, where the theatre was held in low regard. He said in later press interviews that he obtained his first theatrical engagement at the age of 17 with Fred and Julia Neilson Terry at the New Theatre, London, in 'The scarlet pimpernel', but as this play did not open until June 1911 he would have been 19. He appeared successfully in many supporting roles with the Terrys and several other London managements, his first big success coming in 1914 with the name part in Louis Napoleon Parker's 'Joseph and his brethren'. In 1915 he joined the O'Brien-Ireland touring company in Ireland – a move clearly designed to avoid conscription – under the temporary stage name of Martin Doran.

Back in the West End he took the leading role of Jack O'Hara in 'Paddy, the next best thing' by W. Gayer Mackay and Robert Ord, which ran for three years from 1920, but he left before the end of the run to tour with Oscar Ashe's company in Australia, adding several Shakespearian roles to his repertoire. Following a disagreement with Gladys Cooper, with whom he was playing in Pinero's 'Iris' in 1925, he founded his own Shakespearian company, the Intimate Shakespeare Company, touring in Ireland almost annually for the rest of his life. He was guest leading actor in the 1933 season at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, playing the title roles in 'Hamlet' and Coriolanus, and Petruccio in 'The taming of the shrew' (all directed by W. Bridges-Adams), Bolingbroke in 'Richard II' (for Tyrone Guthrie (qv)), and Macduff in 'Macbeth' (for Theodore Komisarjevsky). He was exceptionally handsome, had immense physical stamina, and was admired for his 'great organ voice'. Of his ceasing to act in Britain, Harold Pinter wrote in 1968 that 'the loser was the English Theatre', referring particularly to his 'great sweeping symphonic playing'. He became especially well known for his Oedipus, Othello, and Shylock with his own company, adding Lear in 1952. He relished melodramatic roles such as Svengali in George du Maurier's 'Trilby' and Mathias in Leopold Lewis's 'The bells'.

McMaster enjoyed Irish audiences more than any other, taking particular pleasure in their genuine attention and understanding. He appeared at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, many times, and travelled abroad with the Gate company as Othello and as

Malvolio in 'Twelfth night'. The last Dublin season in which he again played six major Shakespearian roles all in one week was at the Gaiety Theatre in 1954. In 1956 he played the immensely challenging lead role of James Tyrone in the American coast-to-coast tour of Eugene O'Neill's 'Long day's journey into night'.

In 1924 he married Marjorie, third of four daughters of Alfred Willmore and his wife, Mary Willmore (née Lee), of Willesden, London, and sister of Alfred Lee Willmore, known as Micheál MacLiammóir (qv). They rented a cottage on Howth Head, Co. Dublin, during the 1930s, taking up permanent residence in Ireland before the outbreak of the second world war, first at Howth, then in Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, and finally at Strand Road, Sandymount, Co. Dublin. They had two children, Christopher (1925–95), actor and television director, and Mary Rose (*b.* 1926), actress. McMaster died at home at Sandymount on 24 August 1962, when he was about to start rehearsals for a European tour of 'Othello'. His portrait, in the role of Oedipus, is in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. His papers are held by his descendants.

Micheál MacLiammóir, *All for Hecuba* (1946); Harold Pinter, *Mac* (1968)